

Exploring Hong Kong General Ward Nurses' Experiences of Transitional Care for Patients Discharged from ICU

Connie YAU & Martin CHRISTENSEN

School of Nursing, Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR

INTRODUCTION

The transition of patients from ICU to the general wards is a common occurrence. It is a strategy used to relieve pressure on manpower and limited budgets. Currently 10% of ICU discharges are readmitted within 24hrs and have a 30% mortality rate. There is no official stepdown/HDU service available nor is there a critical care outreach team. For this study we define 'Transitional care' as *patients after being transferred from ICU to a general ward within a hospital*

METHODS

- § The aim of this study was to explore and better understand the experiences of Hong Kong general ward nurses who care for post-ICU patients;
- § A convenience sample of 20 registered nurses from the general wards who had experience of caring for post-ICU patients in the previous 12-months were recruited and allocated into 5-focus groups, each focus group interview took 45-60minutes;
- § Inductive thematic analysis was undertaken following Braun & Clark

RESULTS

Four Themes were identified: *'Feeling stressed, unsupported, helpless & alone in providing quality nursing care'; 'Not knowing what I need to know'; 'Feeling uninformed and ignorant of the needs of the post-ICU patients'; 'Remaining hypervigilant in the face of adversity'; 'Being better informed reduces my anxiety and stress'.*

The ward nurses in this study described the difficulties and challenges they experienced caring for the post-ICU patient. Issues around workload and patient allocation figured highly along with a lack of education and training. Many felt scared and helpless when caring for these patients which significantly increased their anxiety. Some were compelled to spend more time with their other patients while others were so consumed with the post-ICU patient that they often neglected their other patients. The handover from the ICU nurse was filled with trepidation and concern because of the level of information being handed-over was alien and complex to them so was the medications and the level of monitoring the ICU nurse expected which was not often forthcoming on the ward simply because they didn't know what they were doing.

KEY MESSAGES

The post-ICU patient poses significant challenges to ward nurses unfamiliar with the level of care they require; Unlike ICU nurses whose focus is on survival and preventing deterioration, the ward nurse's attention is meeting the activities of daily living and progressing the patient's rehabilitation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that these ward-nurses found themselves in a difficult situation with trying to understand of the needs of the post-ICU patient. A lack of support, a lack of education and an increased workload made this situation hard. One possible solution is the development and evaluation of a critical care outreach team to support ward-based decision-making. Combined with formal training and education around the acutely ill and /or the deteriorating patient would be a positive step forward.